

FCC Opens Bureau of Public Safety and Homeland Security

By [Wayne Rash](#)

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WASHINGTON—The Federal Communications Commission is creating a new bureau that will be responsible for a collection of security and public safety functions that had been scattered through several bureaus.

The announcement of the new bureau took place at the FCC's meeting here Sept. 26. The new bureau will have three divisions focusing on Policy, Public Communications Outreach and Operations, and Communications Systems Analysis.

According to a statement released by the FCC, the new Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau is designed to streamline the response of the agency to the needs of responders and others dealing with emergency communications.

The functions in the new bureau will include 911 and Enhanced 911 services as well as interoperability, network security and spectrum licensing for public safety entities.

"During the past year, the commission has also worked to ensure that all Americans have access to emergency services, irrespective of the type of communications technology used to reach these services," FCC Chairman Kevin J. Martin said in a prepared statement.

He said that with the creation of the new bureau, the commission is demonstrating its commitment to move forward.

"One of the bureau's primary functions is develop and implement communications policies that enhance public safety, including addressing the spectrum needs of the public safety community," Martin said.

Martin said that the new bureau will act as an information clearing house for public safety and response issues.

"And in times of emergency, the bureau will lead the commission's efforts to expedite relief and ensure that communications in effected areas are quickly restored," he said.

"As I have said many times, business as usual is just not acceptable when it comes to public safety," Commissioner Michael J. Copps said, elaborating on the chairman's remarks.

I believe this is a step we should have taken more than five years ago in response to the searing lessons of 9/11," Copps said in his prepared remarks.

Copps said, however, that a great deal of work has yet to be done.

"The creation of the new bureau is the easy part. Not to minimize the long, hard work the chairman and the staff put into making today happen, but now we turn to the daunting substantive issues that the commission and our new bureau must confront. These are plentiful, and history will not judge us kindly if we fail to address them head-on," Copps said.

Copps said that the FCC needs to move ahead on making sure that first responders have access to a reliable, interoperable network.

He said that the commission should make rules that build on the steps it took during Hurricane Katrina where it moved quickly in allowing flexibility in the communications environment.

He also added that the FCC needs to move ahead with an emergency alert system, better implementation of E911 for VOIP (voice over IP) carriers, and to expand the FCC's role as a clearinghouse.

In answers to reporters' questions after the announcement of the new bureau, Martin said that while the new bureau has been created, it's too early to announce who would be running it.

He noted that the process happened very quickly, and that additional announcements would come soon.